

The Big Peace Battle

Senate Hearing a Standoff With Rusk And Fulbright as Far Apart as Before

By JAMES RESTON
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WASHINGTON, March 11.—The best symbol of the big Rusk-Fulbright peace battle today was J. W. Fulbright's necktie. It was dark blue with white doves and olive branches stitched down the front. A debate on the war between Ho Chi Minh and General Ky might have been more of a standoff, but even this is not certain. Nobody moved a single millimeter on the war. Secretary of State Dean Rusk made certain concessions of style. He was a dovish hawk, whereas Mr. Fulbright was a hawkish dove, but it ended, as it began, with the Secretary and the committee chairman disagreeing on most of the main issues of the war.

This in itself is one of the mysteries of Washington: How these two highly intelligent men with so many common interests could have spent so many years on so many common problems and ended up so far apart on the issues and priorities of American foreign policy.

They are about the same age—Mr. Fulbright will be 63 next month, Mr. Rusk turned 59 last month. Both are Southerners who came to Washington from University teaching to deal with the great problems of peace in the early forties.

Both were Rhodes scholars at Oxford—Mr. Fulbright took his M.A. there in 1931, Mr. Rusk in 1934, and both have shared a common interest in the organization of peace ever since.

Many Common Interests

Probably never in this century have we had a Secretary of State and a chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee with so many common interests.

Mr. Johnson and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Fulbright, could not have been more different in their backgrounds, interests or personalities, yet they saw each other almost every other day in the critical days after the last World War and established an effective and, at the end, even an affectionate working relationship.

Yet, Mr. Rusk and Mr. Fulbright, for all their shared interests, have never been in one another's house. They kept their Southern manners today, but it was clear from the beginning that even the words they pronounced together with that same lovely Southern inflection meant wholly different things.

The Senator, for example, wanted to know whether President Johnson would "consult" the Foreign Relations Committee before he decided to send more troops to Vietnam. The Secretary replied that President Johnson had consulted Congress more than had any other President of this century.

But this key point was not answered. Mr. Rusk invited the inference that since the President talked to Senators more than most Presidents in history, he would "consult" the Senators before ordering many more troops to the battlefield, but he didn't promise, and with the President looking in on TV, he was probably wise.

Meaning of 'Consultations'

For what Mr. Fulbright means by "consultations" and what the President means are usually quite different. What Mr. Fulbright means is that the President, under the spirit of the Constitution, should honestly seek the "advice" of the Senate before acting on General Westmoreland's request for 206,000 more men.

Mr. Fulbright was asking, in effect, for the President to say: "The war is now going into a new phase. Here is where I think we are after the enemy attack on the South Vietnamese cities. General Westmoreland has suggested a 40 per cent increase in our troop strength. Here are his reasons, and these are the military, economic and financial implications. What do you think? I would like to hear your views before I make up my mind."

Occasionally, President Johnson does precisely this. He followed this procedure in the Panama crisis. But usually he gives the Foreign Relations

Committee the feeling that he is "informing" them or even "telling" them what he is going to do rather than "consulting" them. This was a key issue in today's hearings, and of course it was not resolved.

A more important illustration of the gap between the Secretary and the chairman was the question of how to "organize peace in the world." This is one of Mr. Rusk's favorite themes: That the issue of the war is not Vietnam, but all of Southeast Asia, and not only that.

By going on in Vietnam, Mr. Rusk says, we are preserving Southeast Asia and stopping Communist wars of "national liberation" and proving that we will keep our commitments, and thereby working toward a decent world order.

Mr. Fulbright agrees wholly with these objectives, but thinks Mr. Rusk's policy in Vietnam is not "organizing peace," not proving that "wars of national liberation" are useless, not encouraging the Asian nations to build a system of collective security, not deterring or frightening the Communists, but precisely the opposite.

This is the issue that divides not only Secretary Rusk and Mr. Fulbright, but the members of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Secretary Rusk, and Senators Frank J. Lausche of Ohio, Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut and John J. Sparkman of Alabama seemed to be arguing that if only we persevere through this present agony, we will manage to demonstrate our strength and achieve the objective of a decent world order, but the majority of the committee today was obviously skeptical, if not defiantly opposed.

Nothing Changed

The lineup was fairly clear: Mr. Fulbright, Mike Mansfield of Montana, the majority leader, Wayne Morse of Oregon, Albert Gore of Tennessee, Frank Church of Idaho, Joseph S. Clark of Pennsylvania, Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island and Stuart Symington of Missouri, on the Democratic side, were questioning whether Mr. Rusk was working toward or working against his own objectives, and so were Senators George D. Aiken of Vermont, Clifford P. Case of New Jersey, John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, and John J. Williams of Delaware on the Republican side.

In short, the debate in the big white marble palace of the Senate Caucus Room merely dramatized the trend of opinion in Washington today. It did not change anything. It proved once more that Secretary Rusk is a good and even brilliant advocate who cannot even convince the members of his own party who genuinely admire and like him.

At the end of the day, he had not been able to bring along the people who had fought for his own ideal of collective security—Mr. Mansfield, Mr. Fulbright, Mr. Gore, Mr. Church, Mr. Symington, Mr. Clark, Mr. Pell, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Case, and Mr. Aiken—not only his natural political allies but his natural personal friends.

He was left with Mr. Lausche, Mr. Dodd and Bourke B. Hickenlooper, and for most of the debate he even lost Karl E. Mundt of South Dakota.

It was not because he was not a good advocate or an attractive personality. In many ways, he dominated the entire debate. He was restrained, courteous, well-informed, bold and loyal, but he did not prevail, and the reason seems fairly clear here tonight. He is a good man stuck with a bad case, which he cannot sell even to his old friends and allies.